



# Charles Doe and the publication of John Bunyan's folio (1692)

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## CHARLES DOE AND THE PUBLICATION OF JOHN BUNYAN'S FOLIO (1692)

At his death in 1688, John Bunyan left to his widow Elizabeth the manuscripts of twelve works not printed during his lifetime. When she died in 1691, they were entrusted to Charles Doe, a combmaker and bookseller from Southwark, who had befriended Bunyan two years before the author's death. A year later, Doe published these twelve works in folio, with another ten titles that had appeared in print before. This volume marked a new departure in the reception of Bunyan's work, for publication in folio was generally reserved for eminent divines, not for poorly-educated artisans with a reputation for religious fanaticism.<sup>1</sup>

Although Doe intended that the remaining works of Bunyan should be gathered and printed rapidly, no other folio appeared before 1736. The long delay which intervened between the first volume and the second is difficult to explain, for Bunyan's fame as a practical theologian was growing towards the end of the seventeenth century and beyond. Disputes over the copyright of *The Pilgrim's Progress* and financial difficulties may have been to blame, so too perhaps a personal quarrel between Doe and his collaborator in the venture, William Marshall, for they had certainly fallen out by 1707.<sup>2</sup> There may be some truth in these suggestions, but some annotations in the Bodleian copy of Charles Doe's anthology of conversion narratives, *A Collection of Experience of the Work of Grace* [1700], Bodleian Library Pamph. D. 167 (6), a source barely known to Bunyan scholarship, suggest another explanation: the opprobrium that surrounded the Baptist community in general and Charles Doe in particular.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W. R. Owens, 'Reading the Bibliographical Codes: Bunyan's Publication in Folio', in Neil H. Keeble (ed.), *John Bunyan: Reading Dissenting Writing* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002), 59–77.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 75–6.

<sup>3</sup> I owe the reference to the annotations to Bruce D. Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 56–7.

When he was not selling or publishing Bunyan's books, Doe collected accounts of miraculous cures. In 1695, he added four short narratives of this kind to the second edition of William Eyre's *Vindiciæ Justificationis Gratuitæ*, and in 1705 he published *a Narrative of the Miraculous Cure of Anne Munnings*, this time presenting himself as the chief instrument of the cure. It might seem unfair to suggest that Doe's publishing ventures had as much to do with his need to supplement the income from his combmaking business as with his desire to instruct the godly, and yet it is precisely this mercenary motive that is lambasted in the notes to the Bodleian copy of Doe's collection of conversion narratives.

This volume is profusely annotated, seemingly by one early-eighteenth-century hand at different times, using different inks. The notes begin on the title page, where the annotator's satirical intent is made plain by the announcement that this is 'The 2d Edition corrected and emended by a freind' (*A Collection*, sig. A1r). In fact, the annotator was no friend to Doe. His (or her) identity remains unknown, but there is no doubt that he or she had moved in circles very close to Doe's own. The notes repeat standard charges against the Baptists but apply them to Doe in a way that reveals a knowledge of the Baptist community in general and of Doe's involvement with John Bunyan's work in particular.

When Doe recalls one of his dreams, for instance, the annotator comments that '& w[he]n I awoke in the morning behold it was a dream' (*A Collection*, 34), echoing the end of *The Pilgrim's Progress*: 'So I awoke, and behold it was a Dream.'<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Doe is compared to Bunyan's pre-regenerate Christian: 'before he got in at the Wicket Gate of Regeneration as John Bunyan tells you' (*A Collection*, 39). The annotator charges Doe with putting Bunyan's 'Judgment' in *The Pilgrim's Progress* above the Bible. He asks 'is mr bun: Judgment or Gods word the best Rule to try A Christian by. Rom. 9.32. Rom. [?] 24' (*A Collection* 39). Similarly, when Doe confesses he considers Bunyan's *Saved By Grace* to be 'the best book ... except the Bible', we hear a note of ironic pity from the margin: 'poor Injudicious C Doe!' (*A Collection*, p. 57).

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<sup>4</sup> *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), ed. Roger Pooley (London: Penguin, 2008), 164.

Finally, when Doe recalls how he began selling Bunyan's books, the annotator comments that 'To give good books is better work yn to sell ym But to sell such Lying books as you do is the Devils work' (*A Collection*, 57).<sup>5</sup> Doe mistakes selling such books for doing 'God good services', a delusion matched only by that of his 'fathers' in 1642–3 at the beginning of the Civil War (*A Collection*, 57).

Another series of annotations deals with Doe's membership of an 'open-communion', Calvinistic, Baptist church. At the time of his acquaintance with Bunyan, Doe was attending the 'open' Southwark church, ministered to by Stephen More, where Bunyan came to preach. These 'open communion' Baptist churches, Calvinistic in doctrine but tolerant in church discipline, admitted members to communion who refused to be re-baptised. Doe is accused of having been accepted into that congregation *before* he believed in double predestination (*A Collection*, 45).

Doe had indeed not always been a Calvinist. In 1684, he was a member of the General (Arminian) Baptist church of Thomas Plant. He left it in that year to seek transient communion with More. Since no congregation could admit members not released from their original congregation in an 'orderly' way, there was perhaps some concern that More's church had acted precipitely by admitting Doe. Indeed, once the church was partly disbanded at a later date, it was accused of being too lax in its admission.<sup>6</sup> The Bodleian annotator seems very aware of this charge (*A Collection*, 51).

There is an overlooked piece of archival evidence that testifies to Doe's whereabouts, hitherto unknown, once he had left Plant's congregation. In 1694, after years of protracted proceedings, some particular Baptists formed a Church in Maze Pond, Southwark. These men and women were originally part of a congregation ministered to by Benjamin Keach in Horseleydown. Keach had imposed the singing of hymns on Sundays, thereby creating a schism among the members. The Maze Pond community became known as the leader of the 'anti-singing' faction.<sup>7</sup> Maze Pond was usually careful to obtain permission from other Churches if the members of other

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<sup>5</sup> All underlining in the transcription are present in the original.

<sup>6</sup> Murdina D. MacDonald, 'London Calvinistic Baptists 1689–1729: Tensions within a Community Under Toleration', unpublished D.Phil thesis, Oxford University, 1982, 149–50.

<sup>7</sup> MacDonald, 50–67, 83–108.

congregations wished to join them. In July 1695, one such person was Charles Doe. Therefore, 'Br James Launcen and Br William Peale were appointed to goe to the People that formerly were Mr Plants to acquaint them with Br Charles Does coming off from them and to inquire if they had any thing against his conversation'.<sup>8</sup> The reason that Doe gave for leaving his former congregation had nothing to do with his views on salvation, but rather concerned his dissatisfaction with singing. This was a point that the Maze Pond community judged sufficient to admit him: 'Br Charles Doe formerly a Member with the People that were Plants being dissatisfied with their new brought in singing &c: proposed to Ioyne in Comunion with this Church; the Church was satisfied in the cause of his separation'.<sup>9</sup> Doe was therefore received into the congregation and his autograph signature duly appears at the beginning of the folio in the list of members.<sup>10</sup> This means that no matter how long Doe stayed with More, he was still firmly associated with Plant's former congregation (now ministered to by Richard Allen) in 1695 and Maze Pond did not seem to require any reassurances on his doctrinal beliefs.

Other annotations in the Bodleian copy of Doe's work are not so much concerned with doctrine as with the practice of adult baptism that Doe had defended in *The Reason Why Not Infant Sprinkling, but Believers Baptism ought to be Approved* (1693):

Query. Whether all the anabaptists about town are not bound in conscience to buy of our Authour Charles Doe combmaker all the combs that they have occasion to use to drie and set in order their locks w[he]n they first arise from plunging; out of gratitude to encourage this their mighty champion for his puissant labours shown in his late doughty peice for the defence of their cause intituled The reason why not Infant Sprinkl[in]ge lest our lame authour should be discourag'd ... (*A Collection*, sig. A1v)

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<sup>8</sup> Angus Library, Regent's Park College, University of Oxford, 'London, Southwark, Maze Pond Church Book (folio), 1694-1708', fol. 118. Cited with permission.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., fol. 6.

Like a Baptist ‘mechanic’ preacher, Doe is then accused of combining the trade of combmaking with that of bookselling, while not being above a trick or two for his personal gain:

Or rather is it not out of Superabounding Pride (notw[i]thstanding all pretences to the Contrary) that such a pittifull mecanic as the generallity of people take a combmaker to be should be the collectour and Authour of such Elaborate tracts thus seeking to get a name above his degree, like the protestant footman that wrote against the papists.

Or, to judge as charitably as we can is not the true and real cause self interest, our authour by this practice hoping to sell as many thousand combs as he did of John Bunyans books, therefore politickly puts in most particular directions how his reader may find his shop, in the burrough. London between the Hospital and London bridge (*A Collection*, sig. A1v).

The vitriolic tone of this passage aside, the annotator assumes that both conversion narratives and Bunyan’s books represented a very lucrative business for Doe. The whole tirade could perhaps be dismissed as a rant by an implacable opponent of the Baptists – and a gentleman snob – if it were not for one annotation that seems to have some substance.

This concerns Doe’s alleged connections with an apprentice to a seller of hats whose conversion narrative appears in Doe’s collection, but without the name of its subject being given. The annotator of the Bodleian copy seems to know why the young man’s name was withheld. At the end of the apprentice’s narrative, there appears this note in the margin:

See friend thou beest not under a delusion as the apprentice anabaptist hatseller that had visions to be a preacher & at last run away with his neighbours wife; Charles Doe was not yt in ye borough between ye bridge & the hospital? (*A Collection*, 28).

This could be another libellous remark, yet the annotator's story of the apprentice's adultery may well be true. Doe can be traced in Cripplegate where a famous episode, mentioned in his own conversion narrative, shows him raging against his lack of success amidst the prosperous tradesmen of the area (*A Collection*, 49–50). One Church Book of the Cripplegate area includes a disturbing episode showing that Doe might indeed have been acquainted with a disreputable young man in the hatmaking trade:

1689. Joseph Faircloth Being à member of the Church and an apprentice with à Haber dasher of hats on London Bridge was charged with being guilty of à vaine wanton scandalous conversation with a woman that had <an> evil report for her light carriage who was wife to à cheesmonger in the Borrough of Southwark. For wch He was admonished in the church [deleted word] as also for his neglecting his masters busines and being out late at night at unseasonable times wth the woman afore sayd But he appearing obstinate and impenitent and his offence or sin being greatly immorall to the reproach of his holy profession He was cast out of the Church and totally excluded from its communion.<sup>11</sup>

This is perhaps more than a series of coincidences. Doe can be found in Cripplegate where the Baptist congregation had cause to expel an adulterous apprentice to a hatmaker; the annotator of the Bodleian copy identifies the hatmaker's apprentice of Doe's conversion narrative as an adulterer. If they are one and the same, it is no wonder Doe draws a discreet veil over this young man's name and reputation. The annotator clearly believes that, at times, Doe seriously, perhaps grossly, misrepresents the truth and, in so doing, that he shows 'little [religion] in [his] life and conversation' (*A Collection*, sig. A2v), enough to 'question [his] sincerity' (*A Collection*, 33).

The virulent annotations in the Bodleian copy of Doe's book reveal much about the man ultimately responsible for the folio edition of John Bunyan in 1692. They charge Doe with having a mercenary spirit, with being a religious turncoat, with

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<sup>11</sup> Angus Library, Regent's Park College, University of Oxford, 'Cripplegate Church Book, 1689–1726', fol. 3. Cited with permission.

combining the trades of combmaking and bookselling in an unholy union, and with concealing the true history of a young man whose conversion he chose to recount and celebrate. It seems that John Bunyan's first editor was by no means a respected individual in every quarter. Might this help to explain why the promised second folio of Bunyan's works never appeared until 1736? Were there more like the Bodleian annotator who had no wish to see Bunyan's old acquaintance thrive?

The annotations also reveal that the Baptists continued to be the target of scorn and slanderous remarks, even of hatred, after the Toleration Act had given them the freedom to worship relatively unmolested. The opponents of the dissenters, as these annotations amply testify, were evidently able to gain a perfect knowledge not only of the Baptists' printed works but also of the daily functioning of their London congregations, of their personal lives, of the controversies over the proper administration of baptism, and, in the last instance, of the disciplinary matters recorded in the pages of their church books.

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